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**ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE 6TH DOHA CONFERENCE ON
DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND FREE TRADE
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*WHAT AMERICA MUST DO TO EQUIP MIDDLE EAST YOUTHS TO BE
AGENTS OF POSITIVE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE COMMITTED
TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE*

BY
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Thank you so much for that warm introduction. And might I say how honored I am to be with you today as we participate in what is perhaps the most important hallmark and exercise of a democratic civic engagement: the coming together to discuss big ideas in a spirit of goodwill and good faith in

a search for the common ground necessary to move forward to a better tomorrow.

Whether we are talking about making progress in our neighborhood, our city, our state or province, our nation, or the community of nations, no good or lasting action can take place if it is not preceded and informed by dialogue. Nowhere is this better understood than at the Doha Forum, which has been championing this essential feature of democracy for the past six years.

So again, I am delighted to be with you today and share my thoughts on a very important subject for anyone interested in establishing and maintaining prosperous and stable democratic regimes. And that is, of course, the role of young people as agents of positive social and political change.

You might ask: “What can young people teach us about democracy? After all, they are young and inexperienced. What do they know? What can they do?”

The answer is they know more than you think and can do a lot. History records the profound impact young people have had on our world. Consider these examples:

- ? Joan of Arc, the great French heroine, was only 19 years old when she led an army against the British forces in the Hundred Years War and forced its retreat from Orléans.
- ? Nathan Hale, a hero of the American Revolution, was barely 21 when he volunteered to undertake a dangerous mission behind enemy lines for General George Washington. Captured and hanged by the British for espionage, this 21 year old patriot uttered these famous last words: “My only regret is that I have but one life to give for my country.”
- ? James Madison, widely acknowledged as the Father of the U.S. Constitution, was only 36 years old when he drafted it.
- ? Thomas Jefferson was only 33 years old when he authored the Declaration of Independence.
- ? The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was only 26 when he led the Montgomery bus boycott, a catalyzing event that sparked the Civil Right Movement in America, which brought down the mighty walls of segregation and oppression and opened doors of opportunity not only to black Americans but to women, workers, students, the disabled, and the poor in America and served as the inspiration and model for oppressed people everywhere on the globe.
- ? In 1942, a young 24 year old man joined the African National Congress (ANC) and soon thereafter was organizing boycotts and strikes against the government of South Africa. He was later imprisoned for civil disobedience and spent 28 years in jail. The power of his example inspired his countrymen and the world and washed away the walls of apartheid. We know him as Nelson Mandela.
- ? And for those of my own faith, the most transformative change made in all of human history was brought about by someone who walked the earth for only 33 years. (Jesus)

Why is that young people have been at the forefront of so many portentous moments in history? Why is it that behind every great social or

political movement, you will find the active engagement of youth? Here is what I have learned. Most of the good things that democratic societies value are what economists and political scientists call “collective goods.” Collective goods are things that are available for the benefit of everyone in the community equally whether or not they contributed to bringing that good thing about. Some examples of collective goods are:

- ? Clean Air.
- ? Clean Water.
- ? Healthy Environment.
- ? Equal Justice.
- ? Good Government.
- ? World Peace.

The problem is that because everyone benefits equally from a collective good, no one has a special interest in working to achieve it; in fact, the rational thing is to do nothing and let others do the work since you will benefit if they succeed and have lost nothing if they fail. The problem, of course, is that if it is rational for one person to “free ride” on the labor of others, it is rational for everyone else to free ride, in which case nothing is done and the collective good goes unrealized.

What is needed to overcome the problem of the free rider or rational person is the emergence of the “irrational person.” By irrational I do not mean crazy or incompetent. I mean persons who willingly subordinate the

single-minded pursuit of their self-interest (i.e., rational behavior) in favor of causes that, if successful, will benefit persons in addition to themselves. Young people have always been there when such “irrational persons,” what we commonly call “agitators,” were needed. Young people have the passion, the energy, the commitment, the idealism, and the belief they can change the world. And they can. As Margaret Mead once wisely observed:

"Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Every democratic society that wishes to remain prosperous, progressive, and free -- and any society that aspires to democratic ideals -- must make it a priority of the highest order to maximize the human potential of its young people, for they are its greatest resource and the key to its future. Nowhere is this more true than in this region of the world. The future of this region will be built by the youngest generation and the generations yet unborn. What I would like to discuss today is what my country, the United States of America, is doing to help the countries of this region empower their youth to maximize their potential and channel their energy in furtherance of democracy, peace, and economic prosperity. Specifically, I wish to discuss with you the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), a program approved by the U.S. Congress, of which I am a proud member, and administered by the U.S. State Department.

U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)

Across the Middle East and North Africa, we see the longing of freedom characterized by images of people standing in line to vote in free, fair, and competitive elections. Brave men and women are speaking out about the kind of reforms that they seek for their own countries, including political choice and human rights, transparency and laws that enable opportunity and innovation, the creation of educational systems that produce skilled graduates ready to enter the work force, and most notably their full political and economic participation. The moment is historic, but also fragile. Sustaining and supporting democratic change requires the continued effort and involvement of free nations around the world, especially the United States of America.

As the people of this region work to build a better future for their countries, America stands with them. It is the policy of my government to seek and support democratic movements in every nation and culture. The U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), created in 2002 and funded by the U.S. Congress, brings the resources, experience, and determination of the United States to bear in an effort to bolster the reform movement in the Middle East.

Under the direction of a newly created office in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the Department of State - and in coordination with partners in the region - MEPI is funding programs that help put in place the building blocks for democratic change. MEPI has set in motion more than 350 programs in 15 countries of the Middle East and in the Palestinian territories. Partners include local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, universities, international institutions, and, in some cases, the governments of the region themselves. All of the partnerships produce a multiplier effect, touching a few individuals who in turn touch others to support the rising wave of reform.

MEPI is organized around four big ideas or "pillars": (1) political governance and participation, (2) economic liberalization and opportunity, (3) educational quality and access, and (4) the empowerment of women. I will limit my remarks to the educational pillar because it directly relevant to the role of youth as agents of democratic change.

MEPI Education Pillar

As His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, Sultanate of Oman, remarked so eloquently:

"Challenges of the future are enormous. Enlightened mentality, comprehensive knowledge, and high technical skills are the essentials to meet those challenges ... It is a task the education system must shoulder. It is the duty of each one of us to work for its success."

A well-informed citizenry capable of responsibly exercising its rights is necessary for open, democratic societies to flourish. Without an educated population equipped with the skills to operate in a global economy, democracy in the Arab world will fail to meet its full potential. MEPI is working to support reform in this critical area by focusing on programs that strengthen democratic values and practices within both formal and non-formal education environments.

But in many schools throughout the Middle East, high-quality educational materials are harder to come by. Without them, children in the region are less likely to learn the fundamentals they need to succeed in an increasingly global society. By improving their access to quality education, a democratic mind-set capable of critical thinking and exploration can begin to develop early. Without education, none of the region's reform objectives can be reached.

The MEPI education pillar helps bridge this gap by fostering partnerships between the public and private sectors. It is vital that private industries commit to reform.

One such example is the partnership between Scholastic Inc., the world's largest publisher and distributor of children's books, and MEPI. Together they have joined forces to help bring Arabic-language books to the

Middle East. Through a MEPI-funded program called My Arabic Library, 3,000 schools in Jordan, Lebanon, and Bahrain have received dozens of fiction and nonfiction titles designed to encourage reading, critical thinking and analytical skills.

"Our classrooms lack varied and enriched reading materials that will allow students to enjoy reading outside of their curriculum," says Shaikha Lulwa Al Khalifa of the Bahraini Ministry of Education. "The My Arabic Library program will provide high-quality reading materials that are new and fun for our students. We already have seen some of the books, and they are impressive."

Developing Student Leaders

Another important program in the MEPI education pillar is the Student Leaders Study of the United States Institutes, an intensive program launched in 2003 that brings recent high school graduates and undergraduate students from the Arab world to the United States to train at top universities. MEPI is providing these highly motivated young men and women with instruction in leadership, problem solving, and entrepreneurial skills, as well as a taste of American society. Students also visit institutions such as the Supreme Court and participate in community service projects designed to boost their leadership skills. These students then use their experiences with

MEPI to create opportunities when they go back home. They are the future entrepreneurs and leaders of civil society, private sector, government, and community.

The Student Leadership program has and is opening a world of opportunity for promising students in this region. Listen to Sara Chehab, a MEPI student leader from 2004 who has just been accepted to a master's program in the United States. She says:

"To study and live in the U.S. for two years is something I've been dreaming about my whole life, and it is MEPI that opened the door for me."

The project draws students from all economic backgrounds with strong academic records who are already involved in their communities. These students will benefit the most from exposure to the United States; the principles learned here will stay with them for the rest of their lives and enable them to become leaders in their societies.

As Naoufal El-Lamrani, another program participant, says,

"The most obvious impact this component had on my leadership skills was to gain a full understanding of democratic values and to learn how to better promote those values."

Since 2003, more than 135 students have participated. MEPI maintains its commitment to these motivated youth with follow-on programs that encourage them to continue to push for freedom and change in their

communities. Program alumni attend an annual conference in the region and participate in a network that reinforces what the students learned over the summer, as well as create incentives for students to implement their project ideas.

Students used the skills they developed to create everything from newsletters to campus clubs. One Moroccan student wants to impart the skills he learned at the University of Delaware to five universities in his home country - an ambitious task, but these programs were designed for the most capable students.

Another student, encouraged by his participation in the program, plans to start the first student newspaper at his university. He says:

"I am looking forward to establishing my first step toward building and improving an independent press in my country to serve the citizens, especially the youth."

University Partnerships

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) also assists American universities partner with Arab colleges and universities to improve the quality of instruction, research, and materials, and share best practices. Since 2003, MEPI has awarded 15 grants, worth nearly \$1.5 million, to a number of universities.

The partnerships focus on areas where MEPI is also trying to open political dialogue --such as American studies, media and journalism, and teacher education -- and have spread to ten countries, including Algeria, Bahrain, Oman, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. The program creates sustainable ties among universities, the benefits of which will be felt for years to come.

Success stories are many. Duke University started a partnership with Effat College in Saudi Arabia to produce the first engineering curriculum for Saudi women. A partnership between Oman's Mazoon College and the University of Missouri-Rolla which collaborates on business innovation and entrepreneurship for female students.

Scholarship Aid to Needy Mid Eastern Students

To expand the educational opportunities for marginalized youth, a scholarship program for English Language Study was established in spring 2004. It has to date provided more than 1,500 youth from 13 countries in the Middle East an opportunity to improve their English language skills with curriculum focused on civic responsibility. The program has been greeted with universal enthusiasm in the field and has been expanded to reach up to 13,000 students in 2006.

My Arabic Library

The integration of democratic values into social institutions is often insufficient to sustain the current enthusiasm for the inherent rights of people in their society and their government. Therefore, MEPI's education programs work to provide access and materials that assure a quality education for all people, especially women and girls. The My Arabic Library program represents the first-ever major effort in the region using classroom libraries to develop independent reading, critical thinking, and analytical skills in young people. It means more than one million new books for children across the Middle East, new curricular materials and training for teachers, and more than 30 take-home notes to engage parents in students' learning.

Already, the response has been positive. Mothers in Bahrain lined up to check out one of the few sample books initially available. One teacher yelled out "I love this book!" during training there. A -network of volunteers in both the U.S. and the region has contributed to this unique private-public partnership.

The titles in this series are universal in their appeal to children, with the hope that the books serve as ambassadors of reading and learning to children in the Middle East. The program's first target group is third and fourth graders. Middle Eastern educators selected and endorsed the Scholastic books.

Equally important, experienced trainers from Scholastic guide principals and teachers across the region in how to use these books most effectively. Throughout 2005, more than 300 Bahraini principals and teachers and nearly 4,000 educators in Jordan and Lebanon received top-level training. Improving creative and critical-thinking skills in basic education demonstrates MEPI support for freedom and democracy in the region.

MEPI's Educational Programs Is Producing Tangible Results in Student Civic Engagement and Democratic Activism

Although it is far too early to draw definitive conclusions regarding the success of the MEPI in helping foster an ethic of civic engagement and democratic activist in young people in the region, the early returns are encouraging. Middle Eastern youth are exhibiting a "passion for change" in a number of countries in the Middle East. I would like to share a few inspiring examples:

In Jordan – Students at the University of Jordan documented unsatisfactory medical care in the university's medical center and reported to the school administration. The University worked with the Student Council to improve services, buy new equipment, and hire more doctors. In another project, Jordanian middle school students improved public safety by curbing commercial traffic on a popular pedestrian street.

In Egypt – Eighth grade students in an economically disadvantaged region of Cairo focused on why some students were abandoning school for work. Their investigation resulted in a new payment schedule for school fees and started a "young teachers" group to tutor classmates who are falling behind in their academic work.

In Morocco - Classrooms at one school will be warmer and dryer thanks to junior high students who persuaded the Ministry of Education to investigate their claims of leaky schoolhouse ceilings. Officials followed up to assess and repair the roof problems.

In the West Bank – A Project Citizen team documented unsanitary conditions and inadequate services offered by the emergency room of a local hospital. The students' research promoted additional community awareness of medical practices and resulted in an overhaul of hospital procedures.

And finally,

In Lebanon - Secondary school students in Beirut documented the inadequacy of consumer protection laws in keeping spoiled food from the shelves of local stores. Their work led to an information campaign focused on developing greater consumer awareness.

CONCLUSION

It is important to remember that the work of democracy can never be finished and progress does not come easily or rapidly. But with hard work, active engagement, and purposeful commitment to democratic values and ideals, progress surely will be made. Indispensable to the progress of democracy is the development of a large number of idealistic, passionate, and informed citizens, armed with the knowledge and practical skills necessary to bring about positive social and political change. This has made all the difference in the United States of America. I believe it can be so also in this region of the world. The MEPI is helpful tool in realizing this objective but more, much more, must be done. I look forward to hearing your good ideas. And I expect to take back what I learn here and put it to good work in the halls of the U.S. Congress.

Thank you very much.